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United States Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

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The Horse Protection Act



The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) enforces the Horse Protection Act (HPA). The HPA is a Federal law that prohibits horses that have been subjected to a practice called soring from participating in auctions, exhibitions, sales, or shows. The HPA also prohibits drivers from transporting sored horses to or from any of these events.

Soring

Soring is a cruel and inhumane practice used to accentuate a horse's gait. Soring may be accomplished by irritating or blistering a horse's forelegs through the injection or application of chemicals or mechanical devices that cause irritation. Soring may also be accomplished by the infliction of cuts, lacerations, or burns, or by the engagement of any practice that could reasonably be expected to cause a horse to suffer pain or distress while walking, trotting, or otherwise moving. An accentuated gait may also be accomplished by using inhumane hoof



Gait alterations created by soring the forelimbs may result in abnormal stresses in the hind legs.



Applying substances other than mineral oil, glycerin, and petrolatum, or combinations thereof, violates the HPA regulations.

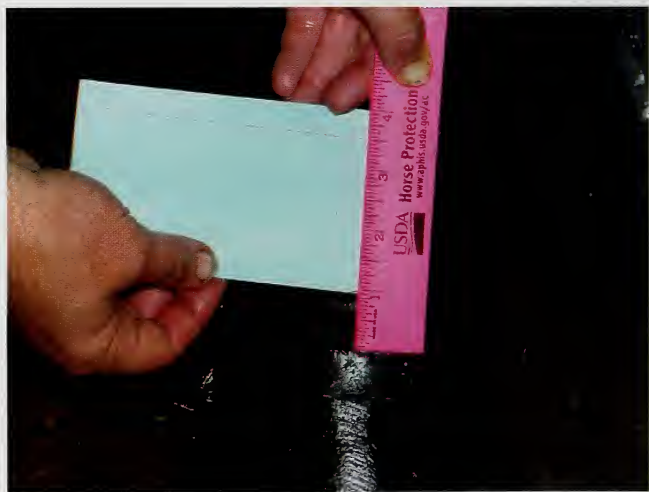
trimming or pressure-shoeing techniques. Sored horses sometimes develop permanent scars in the pastern area due to the use of the painful chemicals or devices involved in the soring process. When it walks, a sored horse responds by quickly lifting its front legs to relieve pain.

In the 1950s, some horse owners and trainers who wanted to improve their horses' chances to win at shows used soring as an unfair shortcut to conventional training methods. Because sored horses gained a competitive edge, the practice became popular and widespread in the 1960s. Public outcry over this abusive practice led to the Horse Protection Act, which Congress passed in 1970 and amended in 1976.

The HPA is intended to ensure that responsible horse owners and trainers will not suffer as a result of unfair competition from those who sore their horses and that horses will not be subjected to the cruel practice of soring. Although the HPA covers all horse breeds, Tennessee walking horses, racking horses, and other high-stepping breeds are the most frequent victims of soring.

Responsibility

Responsibility for preventing sored horses from being exhibited, shown, or sold rests with owners, riders, sellers, trainers, and managers of these events. Owners and trainers benefit if a horse wins a show or sells for a high price, thus leading to greater incentive to sore the horse. Event managers, however, have the major legal responsibility to exclude or disqualify sored horses at their auctions, exhibitions, sales, or shows.



Careful measurements are done to ensure that metal hoof bands are in compliance with the regulations.

Designated Qualified Persons

To facilitate enforcement of the HPA, APHIS established the designated qualified person (DQP) program. DQPs are USDA-accredited veterinarians with equine experience, or they are farriers, horse trainers, or other knowledgeable horse people who have been formally trained and licensed by USDA-certified horse industry organizations or associations. DQPs are hired by the managers of a sale or show to assure that sored horses are not exhibited or offered for auction.

DQPs are responsible for physically inspecting every Tennessee walking horse and racking horse before it may be exhibited, shown, or sold and every first-place horse after it is shown. DQPs must report to show management any horses that do not meet Federal regulations under the HPA. It is show management's legal responsibility to disqualify sored horses.

Monitoring DQPs and Enforcing the HPA

APHIS inspection teams attend some horse events to conduct unannounced inspections. The APHIS inspection team may include veterinary medical officers (VMOs), animal care inspectors (ACIs), and investigators. The primary responsibility of APHIS' VMOs is to evaluate the DQPs' inspection procedures. VMOs also observe horses during shows, sales, and exhibitions and may examine any horse for signs of soring. DQPs may have their license canceled if their inspection procedures do not meet HPA standards.

Signs of Soring

The examination for soring consists of three components: an evaluation of the horse's movement, observation of the horse's appearance during the inspection, and physical examination of the horse's forelegs from the knee (carpus) to the hoof. Particular attention is paid to the area of the coronet band, the anterior pastern areas, the "pocket" of the posterior pastern area, and the bulb of the heel, all of which are typical places for the application of soring chemicals. The presence of abnormal tissue, swelling, pain, abrasions, or oozing of blood or serum may indicate soring. Inspectors also measure for shoeing violations and look for training devices that are too heavy or improperly applied. Heavy, rigid devices striking the pastern and coronet band during exercise can cause soring.



Hooves and pads are measured to ensure compliance with regulations addressing heel:toe ratio and artificial toe-length extension.

Penalties

Criminal or civil charges can be brought against violators. If convicted, criminal violators can spend up to 2 years in prison and receive penalties of up to \$5,000. Civil complaints, imposed through administrative procedures, can result in disqualifications of 1 or more years and penalties of up to \$2,000 or more per violation. Disqualified persons may attend horse events but only as spectators and are not allowed to participate in any other manner.

Additional Information

For more information, please visit the Internet at this Web address: <www.aphis.usda.gov/ac>, or send and e-mail to ace@aphis.usda.gov. You may also contact AC's headquarters office:

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Animal Care

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